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THE ALARM

How one *Philip Lester* carried the same from
His home in *SAUGATUCK*
to *RIDGEFIELD*

by the way of
CANAAN PARISH

At the time of the *Burning of Danbury* and of
His Perilous Adventure with the British after
THE BATTLE OF RIDGEFIELD
A. D., 1777

NARRATED BY EMMA W. LAW DEMERITT

Published by J. E. HERSAM of The ADVERTISER PRESS.
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THE ALARM

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The Compo Minute Man
H. Daniel Webster, Sc.

THE ALARM

A Narrative of the British Invasion
of Connecticut
1777

BY EMMA W. LAW DEMERITT

Drawings and Fotos by W. F. Weed.



John E. Hersam, Printer and Publisher
The Advertiser Press
New Canaan, Connecticut

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INTRODUCTORY.

* * * This little book should tend to deepen the interest in, and definitely locate an important event in Connecticut History.

WILLIAM HANFORD BURR.

Westport, Conn., May 16, 1910.



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COMPO BEACH, SAUGATUCK.

THE ALARM

CHAPTER I.

It was the Spring of 1777. The warm South wind and the mellow, April sunshine had brought out the summer tints on the Connecticut hills and meadows, while from the budding boughs of the mossy, old apple trees, came the clear piping of the robin mingled with the joyous warbling of the bluebird. Overhead, arched the blue sky, in which the hurrying clouds, like stately ships, went sailing by. Beneath, lay the blue Sound, its sparkling waters tossing with the perpetual unrest of the ocean. On the farther shore, the white sandbanks of Long Island, with their background of undulating hills, showed clear and distinct in the morning light.

At some distance inland, on an eminence commanding a wide sweep of the surrounding country, and directly overlooking the river which separated

the Saugatuck district of Norwalk from the Compo district of Fairfield, West Parish, stood a gable-roofed farmhouse. The door of the house was thrown open and a woman, pail on arm, appeared on the threshold. Shading her eyes with one hand, her quick glance swept the entire expanse of glittering water, and the anxious lines in her face straightened out a little as she said with a sigh of relief, "Another night has passed and—thank God! no harm has come to us yet."

She stood for a moment drinking in the exquisite beauty of the scene before her. "What a beautiful world it would be," she murmured softly, "were it not for this dreadful war cloud hovering over us!" Then, she turned to go to the well which stood only a few feet distant, but stopped and gave a little start of surprise. Lying on the doorstep directly in front of her, was a bit of paper with a stone placed on it to keep it from blowing away. She gazed down at it, her look of wonder giving way to a frown of annoyance as she pushed aside the stone with her foot and exclaimed, impatiently, "'Tis another trick of some of these malicious, Tory lads. Truly, I think they sit up nights devising schemes for annoying and injuring us. The old saying is right, 'a fire-side enemy is worse than an open foe.'"

She set down the pail and stooping, picked up the paper and held it out at arm's length, scrutinizing carefully the words, "For Mistress Lester," scrawled on the outside. But they furnished no clue whatever to the identity of the writer, for the cramped, and almost illegible characters were evidently intended as a disguise. She unfolded the paper, and the color left her cheeks and she caught her breath sharply as she read the missive through once, and then again, as if trying to take in the full signifi-

cance of its contents. The communication ran thus:
"Mistress Lester.

"When the destroying Angel saw the red marks on the door posts of the Israelites, he withheld his smiting hand. If any danger should threaten you, or yours, bear in mind, that in **The Sign of the White Cross** alone, lie deliverance and safety. Keep your counsel to yourself—Bide your time, and, **remember!**

"A Tory Who Wishes You Well."

A third time she glanced over the lines. "The Sign of the White Cross," she read aloud, in a voice trembling with emotion. "What mystery is this! Whether it be boyish malice or friendly caution, it but serves the same purpose; to add one more straw to a heart already overburdened."

She folded up the paper and thrust it in the bosom of her gown for safe keeping. "I'll heed the caution and bide my time. I'll see what the next few days bring forth, before I tell the others. One heavy heart will suffice for a household. If I should show the paper to Philip, 'twould only worry the lad, and perchance, needlessly. Let him take what comfort he can. There's no knowing what troublous times the future has in store for him; a capture by the British, perhaps, and the horrors of the prison ship or the sugar-house dungeons."

She shuddered, as she set down her pail, pulled down the well sweep and drew up a brimming bucket, from which the sparkling drops fell with a musical tinkle into the cool depths beneath. The smoke was curling up in faint, blue wreaths from the chimney, as she passed into the house and found an old colored man, on his knees by the fireplace, busily plying the bellows. "Now, Missy!" he exclaimed reproachfully, "what for did yer go an' do dat? What you tink de Cap'en say, if he knew you'se a doin'

Pompey's work? He'd say, 'Pomp, you black rascal, why fore didn' I take yer off to de war wid me as body servant; whyfore didn' I gib yer a chance to cober yerself wid glory in fightin' fer yer kentry! Wasn't it bekase I lef' yer fer to look after yer mis-sus, an' keep her from wearin' herself out wid de common an' coarse grudgery ob de house, dat's jess fit fer ole, black han's like dese.'” He tok the pail from her unresisting hand, filled an iron pot with water, hung it on a crane and swung it out over the blazing logs. “What yer tink de Cap'en say,” he reiterated, “if he come in de room dis blessed moment an' see yer a toting dis heavy pail!”

The tears sprang to Mrs. Lester's eyes. “I'd give all I possess in the world if I could see him walking in, this moment, safe and sound.” She sank wearily into a chair. “O Pompey! My heart is heavy and sad!”

“Shorely, shorely Missy. 'Taint noways surprisin' wen you'se got a husban' at de front, fighting like Goliath, right by de side of Ginerall Washington hisself. An' I 'lows, how you'se got cause fer alarm right chere, at home, in tinkin' you'se got a boy dat's like to be gobbled up by de reg'lars wen dey come across de Soun' on dere debbil's arrands. Dey, an' dose sneakin' Tories only fight de women an' de young boys; dey dasn't face a man! But dere's an-oder side ob tings, Missy. De redcoats hab been gittin' some turrible whacks lately, an' in de back, too—Hurray fur de Continentalers! Den dere's dat Frencher Markiss dat has jess come ober de sea to help fight King George. Why, his bery name, Laugh-yet, is nuff to make de sojers more cheerfuler. You'se feel better when you've had a bite to eat I knows by 'sperience, dat an empty stomach jess takes all de courageous out ob a man. Now you

jess keep still an rest, while I gits de breakfuss."

He hustled around, and put the Indian meal in the pot and stirred it vigorously with a little wooden paddle, while boiling. "Not too much salt, Pompey," cautioned Mrs. Lester, as he slowly sifted in a handful. Then he went to the pantry and brought out a loaf of bread, a print of golden butter, and a big, brown jug of milk, and placed them on the table. "'Taint no such breakfuss as we used to hab in de gloriferous times when de Cap'en was home," he mumbled, looking askance at the scanty meal.

"Whar's de gran' blue chiny fit fer de King?" he continued, in a melancholy sort of chant. "It's buried in a pit under de barn to keep it from de British. Whar's de silver candlesticks an' tankards shinin' fit to put yer eyes out?—Dey's hid in de hollow ob de ole apple tree wid no one but de woodpecker to keep watch. Dere's no plump chicken, no juicy ham, no tender venison, no pigeon pasty," he smacked his lips—"makes ole Pompey's mouth water, jess to tink ob dose good, ole times. If tings gits much worsen, 'specks we'll hab to lib on crow."

"Pompey," said Mrs. Lester, turning to him sternly. "What right have **you** to complain, when our brave men at the front have neither sufficient food to eat, nor clothes to keep them warm."

Pompey hung his head "De Lord knows, Missy, I wasn't complainin'. I was jess a recollecking. Dey ain't no great sin in dat, is dey?" He drew a fiddleback chair up to the table and patted the cushion coaxingly. "Now, you jess sit down an' eat a little, Missy; 'twill do yer a powerful sight o' good." He waited with bowed head while Mrs. Lester said a brief grace. Then he took his bowl of pudding and milk and went out on the leanto, and sat down on a wooden bench, in the sunshine.

Hardly had he lifted the spoon to his mouth when there came the sound of a horse going at full gallop. Hastily setting down the bowl, he ran around the corner of the house, followed by Mrs. Lester. Instinctively, their eyes turned first towards the Sound, for that was the quarter from which danger was ever impending. The British held possession of Long Island and it was a part of their war policy to send frequent parties of regulars and Tories across the Sound to capture and plunder the inhabitants of the Connecticut coast, which was left almost entirely defenseless by the departure of nearly all the able-bodied men for the Continental Army.

But neither Pompey nor his mistress could detect any cause for alarm in that direction. Not a sail dotted the blue water; not even a row boat was in sight. They began to breathe freely once more as a joyous "halloo!" from the road at the north of the house greeted their ears. In a moment more, a young negro dashed up to the house and sprang from his horse with a low bow.

"Mornin' Madame Lester." "De Colonel sends his compliments, an' says to tell you, whenever you wants some mutton, to send Pompey over de river to Compo beach, to kill a fine, fat sheep. I'se jess driven over a flock from Green's Farms 'cause de pasture is better here. Dere dey is now, a grazin' on de salt meadows, mos' a hundred of 'em."

"Thank your master kindly for me, Sambo, and say to him that his gift is most welcome. We were getting short of fresh meat."

"Should say so," muttered Pompey. "'Specks I shall have to be interjuced to dat sheep; it's so long since ole 'Pomp' has had a taste ob mutton."

"I'll send Pompey over this morning to kill a sheep," continued Mrs. Lester. "'Twill give him

ample time to dress it for the Sabbath day dinner."

"'Specks, Missy, I better wait till afternoon. De Captain's orders was, not to leabe you alone, an' Marse Philip won't be back till dinner time."

"Very well, Pompey, let it be afternoon, then." Mrs. Lester turned eagerly to the new comer. "Is your master at home? Truly I did not know that he was expected."

"De Colonel is always a comin', like de unexpected thief in de night time. He hab arrive after dark las' night, and he was up an' off fore de sunrise, so as to 'scape dose spyin' Tories' eyes."

"Did he bring news of the affray at Peekskill?"

"I oberheard him say de British didn' git all dey was after, but dey took so many ob de tents, dat de sojers'll have to do widout."

"Said he aught of the coming of the French?"

"'Specks he's tickled most to death. He sat up till nearly midnight talkin' to de Madame 'bout it. He said the Markiss Lay, a'fit came ober in his own ship and brought some money to help pay de sojers off. Ebery time de Colonel come home before wid a face as long as de horse, but dis time, he's as laughin' as a boy."

"Give Sambo a mug of milk, Pompey; he must be hungry after his ride."

"I tank you, Missy, but I done hab my breakfuss before I lef' Green's Farms. An' as I've considderable plantin' to do yet, I must be off."

With a parting caution to Pompey to keep an eye on the sheep and see that the Tories didn't steal any, and promising to come back every two or three days to look after them himself, he sprang on his horse and cantered away. But he had only gone a few yards when he wheeled suddenly and rode back. "T've done forgotted de considerbbblest part ob my

arrand," he said, with a crestfallen air. "De Colonel and Madame Nash said bery particular, to tell you, if you suspicioned any danger, or any mischief was a brewin' wid de Tories, to take de horse an' Marse Phil, an' come across de ferry an' ride on to Greens Farms an' make de mansion your home. He said Pompey could stay here, an' look after tings, an' if any danger came he could hide de valibles, and take de boat and row across de river an' git away."

"De Colonel 'specks dis nigger to stan' up alone an' fight de whole ob King George's men? Well, if ole Pomp can't do dat, he kin gib de British de longest fox hunt dey eber hab, kase he knows ebery hiding place in dis part ob de kentry."

It was considerably past the dinner hour when the kitchen door opened and a sturdy lad of sixteen entered. "I'm a little late, mother, but I had such good luck fishing, that I couldn't bear to come away. And then, as I came past the blacksmith's shop, there was such a crowd there, all excited and talking, that I stayed to see what it was about."

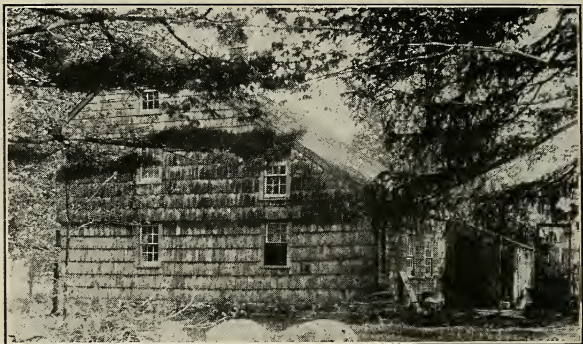
"Any new danger?" interrupted Mrs. Lester, pressing her hand to the paper in her bosom.

"It seems that General Silliman has sent out expresses—warning the people that there are rumors of a British raid by way of the North River, and then cross country somewhere. And as there is no knowing where they may strike, he advises people to be prepared to hide all valuables and take to the woods and swamps at the first approach of danger."

Mrs. Lester rose from her chair and gave a hasty glance at the Sound. "Danger from the South by water! Danger from the North by land. Truly we are beset with peril. O Lord, Thou alone art our refuge and our strength." With an effort she mastered her agitation and went on more calmly,

“Go into the pantry, Philip, and get what you want, while I go and send Pompey over the river to Compo beach for a sheep which Colonel Nash has offered me.”

“All right, mother, and after I’ve had something to eat, I’ll mend that spinning wheel as I promised, so that it will be ready for use.”



TOURNIER HOMESTEAD, NEW CANAAN.

CHAPTER II.

Directly behind the Lester dwelling, was an old orchard with its gnarled trunks and twisted boughs covered with lichen. From this point, the ridge, on which stood both house and orchard, dipped sharply to the north. On this declivity, the Lesters had built their barn, the intervening high ground completely shutting it off from observation by Sound or river. After Philip had satisfied his hunger, he took his tools and went out to the barn to make the promised repairs on the spinning wheel. Mrs. Lester retired to a small bed room, at the northern end of the house, which she darkened, by drawing together the wooden shutters. Then she threw herself on the bed to rest. She was too excited and nervous over the mysterious letter and the news which Philip had brought, to go to sleep at once; but it was impossible to resist long the soothing influence of the dim light and the quiet.

Gradually the sound of hammer and saw out at the barn grew fainter and fainter, and at last, the tension of tightly strung nerves relaxed, and she fell into a profound slumber. When she awoke, the tall clock in the corner of the living room was announcing the hour with exasperating deliberation, "One!—two!—three!—four!" it droned. Rubbing her eyes and yawning, she arose, and bathed her face and smoothed her rumpled hair in front of the little, gilt-framed mirror with the bunch of peacock's feathers thrust behind the shining row of gold balls at the top. Then she donned a freshly starched, print short gown and petticoat, and picked up the little note of warning which she had laid on the blue and white coverlet while dressing. Returning it to its former hiding-place in the folds of her bodice, she went out into the kitchen, and stood, proudly surveying a row of rye loaves which she had taken from the brick oven as the result of the morning's baking. She placed the bread on a moulding board and set it in the pantry. Then she passed out on the porch, and as the air was growing a trifle chilly, she quickened her steps through the orchard and down the grassy slope to the barn. For the first time since the breaking out of hostilities between the mother country and her American colonies, she forgot her customary scrutiny of the Sound.

Philip sat in the open doorway putting the finishing touches to his task. He looked up laughing: "It isn't much to show for a whole afternoon's work, is it mother? You see, I hadn't the right tools and I couldn't get along very fast. But I have fixed it so it goes all right. And, look! I've whittled out a new wheelpin; the old one was loose."

He fitted in the peg and with a few, sudden turns sent the big wheel whirling and humming in its

swift revolutions.

"You have done well, my son. Now, as I shall have plenty of yarn, I shall be able to knit socks for the soldiers next winter." As she turned towards the boy he saw the gathering tears in her eyes.

"Mother!" he exclaimed reproachfully, "you have been worrying about father!"

Mrs. Lester nodded, unable to trust herself to speak.

"It won't do to lose heart now, after keeping up such splendid courage all through those dreadful days when Washington's half-starved little army kept backing, through Jersey, with the Red Coats so close behind, that oftentimes they were within shooting distance of our men who were at work tearing up the bridges! Things have taken a turn for the better now!"

Mrs. Lester's lip quivered, and in an instant, the boy was by her side with his arm around her neck. "Dear, little mother. Brave little mother!" he said gently. "After all, the women have the hardest part of the war. For the men, there are the camp life, and the marching and the glory! but for the women at home, there are only the watching and the waiting. But there is something new troubling you! I saw it the moment I came home to-day. You cannot hide it from me if you would! What is it?"

Mrs. Lester looked fixedly at her boy. "There is a new trouble," she said, gravely. "It may mean something, or it may be merely a trick of our Tory neighbors to frighten us. Wait but a moment and I will tell you what it is."

She drew the paper out from her dress and held it up. "I found this, early this morning, on the door-step. Some one had put a stone on it to make sure that it reached its destination."

She smoothed out the paper and in a voice tremulous with emotion, read it through slowly. Then she paused for a reply, looking expectantly at the boy.

Philip stood, speechless with amazement, staring first, at his mother and then at the paper in her hand. Finally, he managed to gasp, "Do you suspect?"—

"No one!"

"Do you know the writing?"

"No."

"Can you not even guess who sent it?"

"If all the Tories in the neighborhood should declare, under oath, that they wished me well, I wouldn't believe them. A Tory is incapable of wishing any one well," answered Mrs. Lester, sharply. "There is no one of them all, who has for us, aught in his heart but the bitterest hatred, unless—unless"—she hesitated, and looked down at the paper attentively. "There is absolutely no one, unless it is Goodman Hull. I think he would do me a good turn if he could."

"Well he might!" returned the boy, "after your going to take care of his sick wife when none of her own family dared to go near the house."

"I am glad I went. Our families hadn't been on speaking terms for over a year, and bitter words had passed between us on account of their taking sides with the King and our standing firm, by the Continentals. But when he came to me all broken down with grief, my anger seemed to melt away, and I remembered only that Ruth Hull and I had been girls together and loved one another like sisters. It was a blessed thing that I had the courage to go—for I didn't take the fever and I was such a

comfort to her. She died, holding my hand and falling asleep as peacefully as a baby."

"Then if the warning comes from Goodman Hull, we shall do well to heed it." Philip took the paper and read musingly, "'The Sign of the White Cross!' What does it mean!"

Here, he was interrupted by the sharp crack of a distant musket. Mother and son started nervously and leaned forward, listening breathlessly for the second report, which came a moment later, followed by a third. It was the signal agreed upon by the dwellers in the coast towns of Connecticut in case of a sudden invasion by the British.

Mrs. Lester seized the paper and followed Philip, who darted up the slope, through the orchard, into the house and up the winding stairs leading to the second story. Before he could open the door of a large corner room which commanded a view of both Sound and river, an answering "pop—pop—pop" sounded from another quarter. It was the alarm gun, showing that the warning was being passed along. As the boy stepped inside, he ran toward the south window and eagerly scanned the Sound. Not a white sail showed on the shimmering water. On the Long Island shore naught was visible save the gleaming sand banks, changing from delicate, opalescent hues to a deep, rosy glow as the sun dipped toward the western horizon.

A low cry from his mother caused him to wheel suddenly. She was standing by the window, which fronted the east, and he saw her face blanched by fear, while her outstretched hand which was pointing to the river, shook like an aspen leaf.

At the mouth of the Saugatuck was a large fleet, riding safely at anchor. From the tallest mast fluttered the royal standard of King George. Two boat-

loads of soldiers were putting off from the flagship, while the beach at Compo swarmed with scarlet coated troops marching and countermarching. The flashing bayonets, the showy uniforms and gold lace of the officers made a brilliant picture, set off most effectively by the deep, rich background of brown, salt marsh.

Philip was a lad of vivid imagination. He had often wondered what he would do in case of an invasion by the British. He had pictured himself in various heroic, and dignified attitudes, mounted on a fiery charger and making a spirited dash against the enemy—or defending his mother and home against the foreign hordes assailing them. He had even acted out these chivalric deeds, in the barn with Pompey as audience. He was especially fond of rehearsing the receiving of his death blow and falling back gracefully in the arms of the old colored man, and saying, in deep, bass tones, "My country! 'tis for thee I die!"

It was therefore, with a sense of profound mortification that he felt his hair rise straight on end, and the cold shivers creep, in a succession of little waves, down his back. He found that his first impulse was to take to his heels most ingloriously, without a thought of mother, home—or country. But the memory of his father's charge when he left for the war, revived his drooping courage. He could almost feel again the tender pressure of the hand laid on his head, and hear the earnest words, "My son! Fear God, take care of your mother and pray for your country!"

"Mother!" he said, turning to her vixed that he could not control his agitation. "This is no place for you. We may be within range of the guns on shipboard," and in spite of all his efforts his voice

broke into a timorous, little squeak, "Come, let us go!"

As soon as he had reached the lower floor, he began to breathe more freely. Mrs. Lester wrung her hands. "Oh! what shall we do!" she moaned. "If Pompey were only here, he could help us. Poor Pompey! I fear I have sent him to his death out there on the Compo flats."

"Never mind Pompey; he is a man and can look out for himself. Think rather of yourself. You are our first care!"

Philip's scattered wits were gradually returning, and he felt himself each moment, growing more equal to the responsibility so suddenly forced upon him.

"The broad river flows between us and the enemy—thank God for that. If they come this way, they will have to cross at the ford, and that is some distance above, so we shall have time to get out of their way."

Mrs. Lester, followed by Philip, went from writing desk to chest of drawers, gathering her few treasures in an apron. Then they hurried out through the orchard, and stopped at a clump of bushes and rocks near the barn. Philip seized a pitchfork, and using the handle as a lever, tilted one of the smaller rocks to one side, while his mother stooped and hid her valuables in a little hollow carefully scooped out beneath. "The Red Coats will need a hawk's eyes to spy that out," he said, withdrawing the pitchfork and letting the rock roll back to its place. "I wish we had half as safe a hiding place for Black Bess! She's the most valuable thing on the place. Come with me to the barn, mother, and help me think what is best to do."

They stood for a moment, hesitating, by the stall,

Philip with his arm thrown over the mare's glossy neck, when the side door was flung violently open, and Pompey, ghastly and panting, tumbled in a heap at Mrs. Lester's feet, rolling over and over and filling the barn with the most unearthly wails and moans. "Oh! oh! oh! Missy! it's time fer Gabriel to blow his horn. De day ob jedgment hab shorely come! De red coats is here! King George an' his whole army hab landed on Compo beach!"

Mrs. Lester and Philip lifted the old man to his feet. His wooly locks were filled with hayseed, his eyes rolled wildly and his teeth chattered as he told his story.

"You see, Missy, I done kill de sheep as you tol' me. Den I 'member dat de flat fish was a bitin' an' I put de carkiss in de shade, an' sat down in a cleft between two big rocks an' put out my line."

Mrs. Lester shook him by the shoulder. "We've no time to listen to all that. Danger is pressing; we must act at once! Speak out quickly! What has happened?"

"You needn' be so tarrified, Missy; dey isn't comin' dis way at all. Dey's gwine ter march up kentry on de oder side ob de river. Dey wouldn' look at us—dey's after bigger game." Then he went on more composedly. "I 'spose 'twas on account ob de warmness ob de sun dat I fell asleep I was woke by de mos' dreffulest noise—as if de whole creation was a shoutin' an a hollerin' on de oder side ob de rock. I climb up an' peek ober an' dere was de red coats a swarmin' like ants. I drop down an' lay dere, skasely darin' to wink. Pretty soon, some sojers saw me, an' grabbed de sheep by de tail an' me by de hair, an' drag us off to de officers. Dey was all dressed up. wid powdered hair an' ruffled shirts as gay as ef dey was gwine to a

ball. De tongue stuck fast to de roof ob my mouth, an' de chiefest officer;—don' know but he was King George hisself, he strut roun' so gran' jess like a turkey cock,—he holler in my ear, kase he thought I was deaf, "Where you git dat sheep, you ole black-a-moor?"

"I point to de sheep up funder on de salt meadow, an' de officer tell de men to take 'em all an' he'd gib 'em a taste of Yankee mutton. Den he tole 'em, how I was nuffin but an ole, deaf nigger an order 'em to let me go. Den he gib my hair a twist dat like to hab tore de scalp off, an' point wid his sword to de sheep an' say, 'We've done got black wool an' white wool too.' I kep' edgin' off an' actin' as near like a fool as I knows how, until I came to de bank ob de river. Den I scramble down to de boat an' I was half way across before any one saw me. I 'speck every moment to see de balls come skipping roun', but dey didn' seem to tink I'se worth de trouble ob catchin'.

"But I kep' my ears open Missy, while de officers was a givin' der orders, an' I foun' out all de plans. Dey's gwine to Danbury—"

"To Danbury?" achoed Mrs. Lester, with a cry of anguish. "And my sister is there with those four little children, and her husband away in the army! O! Phil! is there no way to warn them?"

Pompey continued: "But I foun' out something else, dat's gwine to be de salvation ob us all. Dat pomptuous officer, tole de men bery particular, dat when dey see de Sign of de White Cross, dey was to pass by dat house, fer it meant dat de folks dere was frien's to King George an' his cause. Ki yi! trust old Pompey. He'll git a chunk ob lime an' mark a big, white cross on de house, on de barn an' on de back of ebery livin' sinner in dis yere house."

Mother and son exchanged significant glances. "The Sign of the White Cross! Now we know what it means. It **was** a friendly warning, after all," said Philip.

Mrs. Lester's lips were pressed tightly together with an air of determination. "Get Bess ready at once," she spoke, very quietly. "I am going to ride to Danbury to warn my sister."

Pompey started at her, bewildered.

"Hurry Philip! hurry Pompey," she urged, "there is no time to lose!"

"Mother, are you mad? Think of the danger."

"Think rather of my sister's danger! I should be a craven to stay here and leave her to her fate. And I may be in time to save the supplies! Make haste. Don't waste a second!"

Philip vaulted into the stall and began untying the mare's halter. Gone were all his cowardly fears. He saw his duty plainly and did not shrink. When he spoke again, it was with a manly, decided ring in his voice. "You are in the right, mother, but it is I who will ride to Danbury to-night."

"No—no! never! The risk is greater for you. **Ex-**pose **you** to the danger of being captured and taken away to those terrible prison ships? No—a thousand times, no!"

"I rather think if any one goes with the alarm, it will be the man of the family," returned Philip, putting the bit in the mare's mouth. "Whoa, Bess! steady there! Back, I say! It's of no use talking, mother. Bess hasn't been out of the stable for three days and you couldn't keep your seat for a moment."

"Take the pillion, then, and let us go together."

"It would make more weight and only delay us. Every second tells now, you know."

"Send Pompey!"

"It would never do. The mare is as wild as a hawk. She'd pitch Pompey off the first quarter of a mile. Steady there, you Bess! Back! I say!"

The mare was a magnificent specimen of horse-flesh, clean-limbed with a glossy coat and a head as slender as a deer's, with sensitive, dilating nostrils. She came out of the barn, plunging and rearing, and nearly lifting Philip from his feet. Then she stood pawing the ground and quivering with the desire to be off.

Mrs. Lester clenched her hands tightly. "O! my boy! I cannot, cannot, let you go. If you should be taken prisoner!"

"But I don't mean to be, if Bess and I can help it. And please, mother, don't put any such unpleasant ideas in my head. I am ashamed to think what a coward the first sight of those red coats made me. But I've got over that now, and just begin to feel like fighting. Don't worry. I shall not take the post road. I'm going by a roundabout way through Canaan Parish; then to Ridgefield to stop at Cousin John's and feed Bess, and tell them there, and then—straight to Danbury! And we'll make the dust fly, I tell you! The road is not as broad and smooth as the King's highway, and it's longer, but there's no danger of running across the red coats, and Tories are not as plenty in Canaan Parish as on the Norwalk turnpike. I've been over the ground so many times while hunting with father, that I think I can pick my way in the dark. Now, remember, you promise, if the British come back this way that you'll go over to Goodman Hull's. After that warning I can trust him to protect you."

"An' don' you let it 'scape your mind, Marse Phil, dat de sign ob de White Cross will save your

Aunt Ellen, if de wust comes to de wust, an' de red coats 'tempts to chaw up ebery man an' woman, an' chile dey meets."

"All right, Pompey! Now, mother, will you give me your blessing?"

Mrs. Lester laid her trembling hands on Philip's bowed head. "God bless and keep you, my boy," she said, in a voice choked with sobs.

Mother and son were clasped in a close embrace, and then, the black mare rushed by like a whirlwind, bearing her young rider, with a bounding stride, up the hill and out of sight.

Mrs. Lester sank on her knees and raised her clasped hands to the heavens. "O, Lord God!" she sobbed. "Keep this thy young servant under the shadow of Thy wing, and in the hollow of Thy hand!"

The old man looked on, his honest, black face working with emotion. "De good Lord pity yer, Missy," he said softly. "It's pretty hard, dat am a fact, to hab to send husband an' boy both out inter de baggonets an' de cannon balls an' de bullets, but"—he straightened up with a sort of majesty—"cheer up, Missy. "I beliebe dis am de Lord's cause, an' I hab ebery reason to speck dat He kin take care ob His own."



KEELER TAVERN, RIDGEFIELD.

CHAPTER III.

After the first mile or two, during which she shied at every white stone, or jumped aside as nimbly as a kitten whenever a broken tree limb or other suspicious object lay across her path, Black Bess seemed to realize the importance of good behavior. She abandoned all gambols and curvettings, and settled down to steady work with a powerful, swinging stride that argued well for a quick passage over the road.

Again and again, as he drew near the little hamlets that varied the monotony of the virgin forest, Philip drew rein and raising himself in his stirrups, put both hands to his mouth and gave a lusty "hallo!"

The startled farmers, driving the cattle home from pasture or milking in the barnyard, caught the cry, so fraught with impending disaster, "The British! The British! 'They're marching to Danbury!"—and

the flying apparition, the clatter of hoofs and the ringing shout, were responsible for many an overturned pail of milk. By dusk, he had passed through Canaan Parish, causing the good women of the quiet, little settlement to rush to door and window, and stand with arms a-kimbo, speculating as to the cause of his break-neck speed. When the shadows of night began to close in on him, he was well on the way to Ridgefield. He lost his way once, for it was difficult in the twilight to distinguish the main thoroughfare, which was grass grown and hedged by bushes, from the blind trails which led into mid-forest. Considerable time was consumed in retracing his steps and he went on, more slowly, as the road grew more and more hilly. He paused now and then to breathe the mare, for on her strength and endurance hung the fate of so many.

Again he turned aside, as he supposed, in the right direction, but after riding a few rods, he felt the thrashing of the bushes against his face and by the splashing of the horse's feet in the water, he knew that the path he was following had ended abruptly in a swamp. This second mistake convinced him of the folly of proceeding in that way. It was only a waste of time. The only thing to be done was to wait patiently, until the coming of the dawn before continuing his journey.

"Patiently!" Philip clenched his hands at the thought. "Up at Danbury, were all those people, unprepared for the danger so near at hand. And the supplies were guarded only by Colonel Cook with a handful of militia. Such a contest as that would be simply a massacre. O what can a helpless boy like me do!" Philip groaned aloud. "Not much by myself, perhaps, but with God's help—everything!" His courage rose with the thought—"Yes, even to

outwitting that wily Tryon and the splendid force which he had seen only a short time before, marching and wheeling on the salt marsh at Compo, in all the bravery of scarlet livery, and tossing plumes and flashing sword and bayonet. Surely, a light rider with a horse as fleet as the wind, ought to make better time, even with unexpected delays, than an army of British soldiers hampered by cannon and camp baggage." He stopped by the side of a small stream in order to water Bess. He dismounted and walked the mare up and down the road to give her time to cool off. Then, he tethered her where she could browse by the wayside, and in this wild and lonely spot, he passed the remainder of the night, chafing and fretting over his enforced halt. One by one, the constellations rose and sank in their nightly procession through the sky. The marsh frogs filled the woods with their plaintive piping, while now and then, the stealthy tread of some wild animal prowling in the underbrush, caused him to start to his feet and whistle to keep up his courage. With the first glimmer of dawn, Philip resumed his journey. He found that he was several miles out of his way, and in trying to recover his lost trail, he wasted so much time that it was after noon when tired, and faint with hunger, he arrived at his Cousin John's home in Ridgefield town.

The inhabitants were not wholly unprepared for the unwelcome news. For several weeks, there had been rumors of a British raid and valuables were already hidden, in stone fences—in wells, and all sorts of out-of-the-way places. Further packing was at once begun, so as to be ready for flight at the first sign of the English soldiery. Much to Philip's disappointment, his cousin John sternly forbade him to go on. "I'll take my musket and ride to Danbury

and give the alarm. It needs an older and a more cautious head than yours to send on such a dangerous errand. After I have put your Aunt Ellen in some safe hiding place, I'll join the militia and strike a blow for liberty. At such a time, a man is needed—not a boy.”

“And the Sign of the White Cross—you'll remember that?” asked Philip, anxiously.

“I'll die before I put the miserable Tory mark on me or mine,” returned Cousin John, flushing to his temples.

The afternoon wore wearily on to the anxious, little household. Towards evening, they heard the booming of cannon to the north, and during the night the sky was lighted with an ominous, yellow glare. The next morning, a horse, flecked with foam, came dashing down Ridgefield street, bearing a messenger both coatless and hatless. “Fly! Fly!” he shouted. “The regulars are coming! Down the road! Through Ridgebury Parish!”

In a few hurried words, he told the awe-stricken, gaping crowd about him, of the burning of Danbury. He pictured for them, the dark, rainy night, the drunken soldiers plundering, and going from house to house with the blazing torch; the women, bare-headed, with little children clasped in their arms and clinging to their skirts, fleeing through the wet and cold, while the light of the cruel flames showed, on the untouched houses of the jeering Tories, the Sign of the White Cross.

Ridgefield street was soon filled with the terror-stricken inhabitants, escaping to the woods and mountains. In one hand, Philip held Black Bess' halter, while the other grasped a big bucket of provisions. The mare, with Cousin John's wife's best feather bed strapped to her back, looked like a cross

between an elephant and a camel. She seemed to resent the indignity of her position, and it was only after repeated persuasion that she was induced to go on, as Philip piloted his cousin's family through the wet meadows to the rocky glen behind the town.

In the middle of the afternoon, one of the neighbors, who had remained behind to protect his property, and who had eluded capture by the British, escaped to the forest, and brought to the shivering, little party under the leafless trees, the news of the battle of Ridgefield.

As soon as General Silliman, of the American Army, heard of the British invasion, he had hurriedly sent out expresses and had gathered about five hundred men—taking them from the plow and the workshop, as he went along. On his march to Danbury, he was joined by General Wooster and General Benedict Arnold, each with a small force. Owing to the delay caused by the heavy rains, they did not reach Bethel until late Saturday night, and they decided not to attack the English until daylight. Early on Sunday, General Tryon began his hurried march back to his ships at Compo. Gen. Wooster dispatched General Silliman and General Arnold to Ridgefield to intercept the British, while he undertook to attack them in their rear. After a spirited sortie, the brave, old patriot was mortally wounded while rallying his men to a second charge. In the meantime, Generals Silliman and Arnold barricaded the narrow pass at the upper end of Ridgefield street and held it against the enemy until the latter gained the ledge of rocks above and forced the Americans to retreat.

General Arnold fought with the most reckless courage, having his horse shot under him, while he calmly received the fire of a whole platoon of sol-

diers. Better far, had he perished there, on the field of honor, than to have lived to betray the country which he had served on so many occasions, with such splendid and distinguished bravery.

It seemed to Philip and his friends in the solitude of the woods, that the afternoon would never end. Twice, he begged to be allowed to go and see how it fared with the town, but was refused. The third time, he was more successful.

"It's almost dark," he pleaded, "and I'll take Black Bess and make sure no one is in sight, before I go on," and his cousin's wife urged on by her own anxiety, consented. Philip led Bess to the edge of the woods and then rode boldly over the first clearing. On he went, more cautiously, over the brook, and up the hill and through a strip of wood. Finding the way clear, he made a long detour to avoid a wide, deep ditch, and, encouraged by the stillness and the fast gathering darkness, entered a second belt of forest, and had nearly reached the farther side, when he came directly upon three troopers, lying on the ground with their horses picketed beside them.

Gen. Tryon had encamped for the night at Ridgefield, and like a wary commander, had widely extended his picket line.

"Who goes there!" shouted one of the soldiers, startled at the sudden apparition.

"Who goes there? Halt! and give the countersign," rang through the woods, and Philip knew by the clanking of swords and the jingling of spurs that the soldiers were preparing to give chase. Crash, crash, went the hoofs over twigs and bushes, and as the riders emerged from the obscurity of the forest, the foremost trooper leveled his pistol at Philip. "Halt! I say! For the last time, Halt, or I'll

send a bullet through that Yankee skull of yours. Down with all rebels and long live King George."

There was a flash—a report—but quicker than the ball sped Bess through the meadow. A stone fence stood in the way, but Philip's courage rose as he remembered the mare's famous jumps in the past. Over she went, swerving not a jot, and cleared the fence at a bound. Two of the horses following refused the leap, but the third, a lean, muscular roan, went over pluckily, and kept up the chase, gaining a little all the while. It was now, a race for life. On dashed the mare, while behind labored the panting roan. Suddenly there yawned wide, the dreaded ditch. Philip measured the distance with his eye. It was a fearful leap: was the mare equal to it! He made ready for the jump and with a low word of encouragement, urged Bess forward. She gathered herself for the spring and sailed over like a bird.

There was the sound of a heavy fall, and glancing back, Philip saw the trooper flung headlong to the ground, while the big roan floundered helplessly at the bottom of the ditch. It was plain that the chase would not be renewed. Holding Bess in, he could not refrain from a triumphant shout. "Down with the British and long live General Washington, I say."

Then he went on more slowly and reached the shelter of the woods, safe from further pursuit.

The day after the British had retreated to their ships in the harbor and sailed away from the inhospitable Connecticut shore, Philip rode back to Saugatuck. His heart was light indeed, for he had learned on the way that his home was untouched, and he brought moreover, the good news of the safety of his Aunt Ellen in Danbury and of his Cou-

sin John and family. He was also not a little proud of the part he had taken in the skirmish of Ridge-field.

As he came in sight of the house, he saw Pompey perched like a crow on the stone fence watching. "Now, may de Lord be praised!" ejaculated the old man, brokenly. "Yender stan's yer ma, a smilin' in de doorway, an' here you is, not eben a hair ob yer blessed head harmed, an' de black mare's safe an' sound!"

THE RED WAVE.

'T was more than a century ago—
The blue waves broke in ceaseless flow
On the yellow beach that a border made
Like the buff and blue of an old brigade,
Braided with sunlight on the shore
On the Compo sands in the days of yore.

But a Red Wave came from the boding west
And bayonets gleamed like a foaming crest,
And it broke and spread on the Compo sands—
The scarlet coats of the British bands—
A wave that hissed like a spray-beat coal
As the lines "fell in" to the long drum-roll.

Inland it spread like a forest fire
And the patriot homes became a pyre
'Till it struck a blue line like a rock
And reeled and fled at the shattering shock
As the guns of the farmer soldiers spoke
And held their ground like the groves of oak.

So backward hurtled the scarlet wave—
Broken and harried, but grim and brave—
That left its record of oozing blood,
A weaker wave in its ebb than flood.
With humbled banners and lowered crest
It faded away in the lurid west.

A red wave comes to the shore today,
But it has a fairer part to play;
It sends a greeting across the blue
To brothers in tears for a ruler true.
This warm red wave is our common blood
That beats in a friendly brotherhood.

But ever, a border of buff and blue,
The sand and sea shall treasure the hue
Of the patriot soldiery long at sleep
While the sentry's eyes the waters sweep,
Embodied prayer that upon this shore
A hostile wave shall break no more.

CHARLES H. CRANDALL.

Idylland, Stamford, Conn., June 17, 1910.



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